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Broad scale change in Montana State University curriculum

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News

FOR RELEASE WEDNESDAY, APRIL 21

By Jack Ryan

It isn't necessarily so that the reading, writing and arithmetic that your father learned is the same thing that they have to teach at the university today. This simple fact underlies the broad scale change in curriculum that Montana State University will undertake starting this year.

The change itself is no overnight development. While the immediate phases are concerned with acceptance of the plan by the MSU Faculty Senate in February, and approval by the Board of Regents at its most recent meeting, the start of the change dates back to 1960. Actually, the change had its roots much further back than that. It is a fact that the University tried to institute a broad scale curriculum change 22 years ago, but the plan came to naught. According to Dr. Frank Abbott, Academic Vice-President of MSU, this may very well be the first time in its history that the University has so thoroughly overhauled its curriculum.

There have been year-to-year changes in courses offered at the University, dictated by the need to adopt newer and better methods of teaching, and new subject material. However, education has changed rapidly since the end of World War II, and it has become necessary to make a unified attack on the problems of change.

According to Dr. Abbott, education is never static, but some new problems have been engendered by the post-war era. For one thing, a greater proportion of high school graduates is heading for college than took that path 20 years ago. For another, there are demands for training in fields that didn't even exist then. For a third, there has been a drastic change in the approach to basic thinking on how a professional program should be taught.

(more)

In Abbott's words, "We have changed the approach from 'how to do it' to 'why do we do it?' and 'What are the underlying features of the field?'" There is less emphasis on skill courses and more on the sciences that may underlie a field. Montana is not alone in making an over-all study of curriculum, because variations of the same thing are going on at colleges and universities all over the nation, he indicated.

As a particular example of how curriculum is being regeared to meet the times, the plan at MSU calls for establishment of a Master of Business Administration degree. This is a two year graduate program, planned especially for those who have attained a bachelor's degree in arts and sciences, forestry, pharmacy and similar fields. The purpose is to provide a student with the educational tools he will need for management in the field of his specialty. It is a readily observable fact that specialists in various professional fields do tend to gravitate toward management, and business techniques are necessary for those who are called on to run a business.

Before the change is completed, nine existing degrees or majors will be dropped by the University and 11 new ones added. The net increase will include 160 courses and 490 credits spread through 41 schools and departments.

Now that the University has taken the necessary steps to put its curriculum in order, it is planned that from here on the entire program will be subject to broad scale review every four or five years.